



CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY  
**NEWS RELEASE**

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Department of Toxic Substances Control

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**T - 34 - 05**

For Immediate Release

June 7, 2005

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**Kaiser Permanente Hospitals Receive Award for Mercury Elimination**

**Walnut Creek** – “The elimination and reduction of the use of mercury are essential first steps to stop the potential release of this chemical to our environment. The State of California would like all California hospitals to become virtually mercury free by the end of 2005. Kaiser Permanente has taken the lead in its construction of three mercury free facilities; Roseville, Fresno, and Fremont, in Northern California and is working on building its fourth in Santa Clara.

“The elimination and proper disposal of mercury containing products and replacement with products that are mercury free reduce the potential release of mercury to our environment,” said B.B. Blevins, Director of the Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC).

DTSC’s Mercury (Hg) Elimination Leadership Program (HELP) today honored 22 individual Kaiser Permanente California hospitals for achieving the goal of virtual elimination of mercury. In addition, Kaiser Permanente was presented with a Corporate Certificate of Appreciation for reducing its use of mercury and its commitment to build “mercury free” hospitals in California.

“HELP” is a joint effort of the DTSC, the California Department of Health Services, the United States Environmental Protection Agency Region IX, Hospitals for a Healthy Environment, the California Hospital Association, and the California Water Environmental Association

Through the voluntary DTSC program, Kaiser Permanente has reduced the level of mercury usage at its California medical facilities by 87% on average. Some Kaiser hospitals in the State have achieved a 99% elimination of mercury products in addition to four recently constructed Kaiser Permanente facilities built virtually mercury-free. The Department’s mercury elimination program encourages and honors hospitals that achieve virtual elimination of mercury from their operations.

Mercury is a reproductive toxin and a potent neurotoxin. When hospitals throw away mercury-containing devices such as fever thermometers, blood pressure measuring devices, and other mercury-containing products, the chemical can reenter the environment. According to the U.S. EPA, medical waste incinerators are the fourth largest source of mercury re-entering the environment. In addition, it estimates that mercury fever thermometers contribute about 17 tons of mercury disposed of in solid waste landfills annually.

"Kaiser Permanente is at the forefront of efforts to make the health care industry environmentally sustainable. Kaiser is a national leader in eliminating mercury, reducing the use of hazardous chemicals and products, and choosing safer sustainable alternatives," said Stacy Malkan, communications director for Health Care Without Harm, a coalition of more than 400 groups in 53 countries working to reduce pollution in health care.

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Under the HELP program, hospitals achieve virtual elimination of mercury after they have:

1. Inventoried all mercury devices and sources
2. Replaced, at a minimum, 75 percent of sphygmomanometers, clinical mercury containing devices, laboratory chemicals containing mercury, and mercury laboratory thermometers. They also prepared a plan for total elimination of the remaining devices
3. Replaced patient mercury thermometers with non-mercury containing devices
4. Developed and implemented a fluorescent tube recycling program
5. Developed and implemented a mercury and alkaline battery collection program
6. Prepared and put into practice an Environmentally Preferable Purchasing (EPP) Statement that bans the purchase of mercury containing items without prior approval

Hospitals that were built mercury free meet all of the following goals:

1. Use non-mercury devices and sources where alternatives are available, and or feasible.
2. Have a fluorescent tube recycling program.
3. Have a mercury and alkaline battery collection program.
4. Have in practice an Environmentally Preferable Purchasing (EPP) statement that bans the purchase of mercury-containing items without prior approval.
5. Have a plan for total elimination of mercury laboratory chemicals.

“Reaching these goals benefit the environment and also demonstrate Kaiser’s commitment and leadership in pollution prevention,” said Blevins.

Kaiser Permanente facilities receiving the commendations were:

- Baldwin Park Medical Center
- Bellflower Medical Center
- Fremont Medical Center
- South Bay Medical Center (Harbor City)
- Hayward Medical Center
- Los Angeles Medical Center (Sunset)
- West Los Angeles Medical Center
- Oakland Medical Center
- Panorama City Medical Center
- Redwood City Medical Center
- Richmond Medical Center
- Riverside Medical Center
- Sacramento Medical Center
- South Sacramento Medical Center
- San Diego Medical Center
- San Francisco Medical Center
- Santa Teresa Medical Center (San Jose)
- San Rafael Medical Center
- Santa Clara Medical Center
- South San Francisco Medical Center
- Vallejo Medical Center
- Walnut Creek Medical Center

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**The Department of Toxic Substances Control’s mission is to restore, protect, and enhance the environment and ensure public health, environmental quality and economic vitality by regulating hazardous waste, conducting and overseeing cleanups, and developing and promoting pollution prevention.**